

# TURNER PRIZE 07

## Tate Liverpool Educators' Pack

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## The Turner Prize

Since 1984 this contemporary and often controversial British art award has been presented at Tate Britain. For the first time the prize is to be held outside of London in acknowledgement of Liverpool's status of European Capital of Culture in 2008. The Turner Prize, with £25,000 going to the winner and £5,000 each for the other shortlisted artists, is awarded to **a British artist under fifty for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the preceding twelve months**. It is intended to promote public discussion of new developments in contemporary British art and is widely recognised as one of the most important and prestigious awards for the visual arts in Europe.

The Turner Prize exhibition features the work of this year's four short listed artists and opens on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2007. The winner will be announced at the televised event which also takes place at Tate Liverpool on December 3rd.

The four artists who have been nominated for the 2007 Turner Prize are:-

**Zarina Bhimji** - for her solo exhibitions at Haunch of Venison, London and Zurich, with work engaging with universal human emotions such as grief, pleasure, love and betrayal using non-narrative photography and film-making. Through powerful, atmospheric and poignant

imagery, Bhimji's recent work demonstrates a new approach to her long-standing preoccupations and research.

**Nathan Coley**- for his solo exhibition at Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, the public installation *Camouflage Church*, Santiago de Compostela, Spain and his contribution to the group exhibition *Breaking Step - Displacement, Compassion and Humour in Recent British Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Serbia. and its architectures.

**Mike Nelson**- for his solo exhibitions *AMNESIAC SHRINE* or *Double coop displacement*, Matt's Gallery, London and *Mirror Infill* (2006), Frieze Projects, Frieze Art Fair, London.

**Mark Wallinger** - for his solo exhibition *State Britain* at Tate Britain.



Mark Wallinger  
*State Britain* 2007  
Installation view at Tate Britain  
© Mark Wallinger  
Photocredit: Sam Drake, Tate Photography

This pack contains information and suggested activities for educational groups visiting the exhibition and a guide to further resources. It aims to introduce students to the ideas and concepts behind art prizes and to discuss the role of the media in the presentation and interpretation of art.

Students are encouraged to explore the work of contemporary artists by looking at and discussing the actual art objects in the context of the exhibition. There are also ideas for related activities in the classroom or art studio.

The history of the prize is covered in depth at <http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/turnerprize2007>

# Artist in Focus

## Zarina Bhimji

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Born in Uganda, 1963, now living and working in London, **Zarina Bhimji's** work engages with universal human emotions such as grief, pleasure, love and betrayal using non-narrative photography, installation and film-making. Born in Uganda, her work of the past decade has largely been a response to returning to East Africa. Though her approach to art is intensely subjective, the resulting image is universal, and intended to appear *"distanced from its personal or historical specifications"*.

The image of a pile of papers in *"No Border Crossing"*, for example, offers no indication to help the viewer to determine whether they are public or private documents, or to help locate them in time and place. Yet, the artist has created an aura around these abandoned heaps that simultaneously intrigues and disturbs. The viewer's imagination is stimulated as is the need to find out more.

Bhimji has said of her approach to art *"I work in a way where information and research become a crucial starting point"* She does not simply document life, but thoroughly investigates her subject matter in order to eliminate myth and to reach the truth. She addresses her subject matter with an enquiring mind – a need to know, understand and empathise. She said, *"It is important that the work expresses beauty and tenderness"*.

The artist has cited the poet T.S. Eliot as an influence on her work. *Waiting*, for example, is a film made in a factory, capturing the feel of the building through a slow panning and a series of meticulously composed frames. She claims that the pattern of her editing is based on the Imagist poet's irregular verse structures.

Bhimji's photographic series *Love*, begun in 1998 developed out of her research for the 2002 film, *Out of the Blue*, made in Uganda.



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**Nathan Coley** was born 1967 in Glasgow where he lives and works. His art incorporates a variety of media, making sculptures and installations based on architectural themes that are usually site-related. He created a site-specific work for Tate Liverpool in 1998 as part of the Art Transpenine project, based on the non-conformist church in Toxteth.

His work is rooted in ideology and the built environment. It explores ways in which buildings and public spaces can symbolise systems of social, political and religious doctrine. Certain concepts and values are made to seem natural, inevitable aspects of everyday life through a relationship with social institutions and structures.

Coley intends his works to provoke discussion rather than to make a statement, and his own position in relation to the themes explored is always ambiguous. He uses materials with connotations, associations and suggestions. He says that "*the generation of discussion is the centre of the work rather than the object*", and that his work is a "*trade in ideas*"

The artist's installation at Tate Liverpool is bounded by two "threshold" sculptures which must be negotiated in order to enter the exhibition space. Within this area are three works entitled *Annihilated Confessions* which consist of framed black and white photographs of confession boxes almost entirely obliterated by a rectangle of black paint that has been sprayed onto the glass. As with all of his works, the materials used by Coley are loaded with significance. The oak used for the thresholds has associations of integrity, morality and stability leading to a suggestion, perhaps, that even the firmest and established boundaries can be transgressed. Spray paint, used here on the glass, is also employed by graffiti artists in order to break rules and assert identity – a form of anarchistic self-expression. It is also an efficient method covering a surface and obliterating everything beneath it with one fast, easily applied coating. And so, by using materials with significant associations, the artist raises questions about censorship, the validity of confessions and artistic freedom within the confines of society.

*Land of Hope* focuses on a hand-built model of an English working class house in a state of incompleteness. Its condition is ambiguous. Is it a ruin? Is it being renovated? Has it been vandalised or is it simply not finished? The title of the work alludes to the romantic English song *Land of Hope and Glory* which was written at the height of the British Empire and is still sung patriotically and with nostalgia at the *Last Night of the Proms* each year. Could Coley's unstable structure somehow be symbolic of the state of the country itself?



Nathan Coley  
*There Will Be No Miracles Here* 2006  
Courtesy doggerfisher and Haunch of Venison © Nathan Coley

Many of Coley's works include written text and these incorporated words and phrases can also be open to interpretation. Statements can have different meanings depending on tone, case, font or social, historical and physical context.

*There will be No Miracles Here* is a textual work with three words mounted on scaffolding, spelt out in light bulbs. The materials undermine the authoritarian tone of the statement by giving it a stagy appearance. The sentence itself is absurd for a miracle by its nature is a supernatural happening and cannot be prevented by a command. The work was originally made for an open-air site on the Hebridean Isle of Bute, a location where life was traditionally hard. Miracles were no doubt prayed for but seldom received. Re-staging the work in an interior space changes both its character and possible interpretations. There will be no miracles in the Capital of Culture, a city looking to re-invent itself or, more specifically, at Tate Liverpool, host to the Turner Prize? Perhaps it refers to the artist's chances of landing the prize?

**Discuss** ideas that might be suggested by Coley's work in the exhibition. How do you interpret these works?

**Research** the history of a building in your town and **create** your own installation art based on ideas, stories, facts that you have uncovered. Use mixed media eg photographs, paint, found objects, newspaper cuttings, quotations etc

**Discuss** buildings that control human behaviour (eg schools, churches, libraries, workspaces, prisons, art galleries, sports facilities etc)

How do they influence our behaviour? Think of examples (eg being quiet in a library, following the layout of an exhibition, queuing at a bank etc). Think of ways to change the way people behave in these buildings. How could you disrupt behaviour patterns in these buildings?

**Make** your own text work – think of a statement and try spelling it out in different materials. How does the appearance alter the tone of the words?

## Artist in Focus





German fairytale, *The Singing Ringing Tree*, which features a prince who is magically transformed into a bear, could also have been a subconscious influence. The proximity of the city zoo could also have been in his thoughts.

The title, *Sleeper*, was also a name given to spies during the Cold War who blended into their surroundings by adopting local dress and characteristics. By choosing to disguise himself in the trappings of the city's most recognisable icon, the Berlin Bear, Wallinger raises questions about civic and national identity.

The title could also refer to the fact that when this film was recorded, ie October, the bear should have been in hibernation. Instead, he restlessly slouches through the gallery spaces, under surveillance (in turn, shown as a film in a gallery space watched by its visitors).

**Discuss** your personal responses to *Sleeper*. How does it make you feel? Is it funny, sad, serious? Why is the artist dressed as a bear? What is he doing? What is the relationship between artist and viewer? Is the architecture/location significant?

**Find** other examples of the bear as a heraldic symbol, stories that feature bears etc. What associations does this animal have in myth, legend, heraldry etc? What other animals/creatures have been adopted as civic emblems?

**Research** the history of Berlin. Do you think Wallinger's film is site-specific? Do you think it would have taken on different connotations/meanings for the audience in Berlin than it does in Liverpool?

**Imagine** spending a night on your own in a public building (eg museum, art gallery, town hall etc) Describe what you think it would feel like.

## Other Activities

### In the Gallery:

1. **Visit** the Turner Prize exhibition and assess the work of the shortlisted artists. Make some notes on each:-

- How would you describe the artist's work?
- What is the work about?
- Does it remind you of anything else?
- How has it been made – what materials and techniques were involved?
- What are your personal responses to this artist's work?

As a group, **discuss** the merits of each artist. Who would you award the Turner Prize to and why?

2. **Write** a report on the exhibition. How is it different from other displays in the gallery (besides the actual art-works, look at lighting, signage, information, layout etc)? Why do you think it is different?

3. Book a gallery **tour** or auditorium **talk** to find out more about the Turner Prize and the short-listed artists.

## In the Classroom:

1. **Discuss** other prizes that you can think of (eg Oscars, Brit Awards, Sports Personality of the Year, Soap Awards etc)

- Do you think that awards and prizes offer a fair assessment of achievement?
- Can you suggest a better way of evaluating art, music, literature, drama etc?
- Do we need awards?
- What purpose do they serve?

2. **Research** the history of the Turner Prize from the Tate website:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/turnerprize2007>

Find out about some of the artists that have won the award in previous years and read what the press have written about the more controversial works. The site also contains cartoons from the newspapers.

- **Discuss** the role of the press in reporting art events

## Create a new art prize!

### 1. The Prize

As a class or in groups, decide on:

- A name for your prize. This should be significant – eg the name of your school, the name of a benefactor etc
- Which artists will be eligible? Will there be an age limit? Can artists from any period in art history be considered? Do they have to be British artists?
- What criteria will be used to select a shortlist? Will they be artists who have been influential in art history, personal favourites of the class, artists who have made an impact in the last year, up-and-coming artists or established masters, etc
- Who will decide on a winner? If you are doing this as a class, a panel of judges should be selected.
- Who will fund the prize? This can be imaginary!
- Decide on a date and venue for the presentation and announcement of the winner.

### 2. The Shortlist

Publicise your prize:

- Write a synopsis of each artist's career and why he/she has been nominated
- Collect images of his/her work. Find out about them and discuss them as a class or in groups.
- Put together short presentations on each artist
- Make advertisements for the prize in the form of video, newspaper publicity. Think where else/how else you can let the public know about your prize and the big event!

### 3. The Exhibition

Organise an exhibition of the short-listed artists' work (this can be imaginary or real)

- How will the artists' work be displayed? How much space will they have? How will they be arranged? Will some works have special requirements eg video, installation, conceptual art etc. Consider lighting, signage, accessibility, security, health and safety, opening times, ticket pricing etc
- Organise a public events programme – artists' talks, workshops for schools, guided tours of the exhibition. What other events can you think of that would make the prize and exhibition more interesting for the public?
- Write a leaflet or catalogue
- Write information panels and explanatory labels for the works in your exhibition

### 4. The Event

- Plan the evening's schedule – who will be invited? Draw up a guest list. Will they be given food and drink? How will they be accommodated – chairs at tables, in rows etc? Will entertainment be provided? Will there be guest speakers? Who will present the prize?
- Press and publicity - Will the event be televised? Will the press be invited?

### 5. The aftermath

- Pretend that you are news reporters and write reports of the event. Highlight the winner and discuss the merits of his/her work. Describe what happened at the event. Do you think the right artist won?
- Have a post-event discussion on the prize. What was successful? What would you do differently next time?

### Further Reading:

**Button**, Victoria, *The Turner Prize: Twenty Years*, Tate Publishing, 2004,

**Brooks**, A et al, *Sensation, Young Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, Royal Academy of Arts, 1997

**Buck**, Louisa, *Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now*, Tate Publishing, 1998

**Greenberg**, Reesa (ed) *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, 1996

**Serota**, Nicholas, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, Thames and Hudson, 2000

**Stallabrass**, Julian, *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of BritArt*, Verso Books, 2006

### Other resources

<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/turnerprize2007>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/history/default.htm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/gallery/2007/may/08/turner2007?picture=329813894>

<http://www.zarinabhimji.com/index.htm>

[http://www.spinScotland.co.uk/events/view/nathan\\_coley\\_at\\_mount\\_stuart/](http://www.spinScotland.co.uk/events/view/nathan_coley_at_mount_stuart/)

<http://interface.a-n.co.uk/reviews/single/377473>

[http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/T/turner\\_2001/MikeNelsonMain.htm](http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/T/turner_2001/MikeNelsonMain.htm)

<http://www.mattsgallery.org/artists/nelson/exhibition-3.php>

Julie Robson, 2007